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Who and What Is the Field of Applied Linguistics Overlooking?: Why This Matters and How Educational Linguistics Can Help

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Abstract

Thousands of individuals in the United States, Canada, and elsewhere are currently endeavoring to learn highly endangered, Indigenous languages, most laboring under conditions that are radically different from the majority of world language learners. These learning contexts are defined not only by shortages of materials, limited domains of use, few proficient speakers, and wide dialectal variation, but by histories of colonialism, racism, and oppression. To date, there has been relatively limited interaction between applied linguistics scholarship on language learning on the one hand, and Indigenous language education on the other. Concomitantly, despite massive worldwide demographic shifts of recent decades, applied linguists still know relatively little about simultaneous additional language and initial literacy learning among students with interrupted or limited formal schooling. Yet, these students are among the fastest growing populations in many U.S. districts and elsewhere. Drawing on the roots and four decades of scholarship in Educational Linguistics as a field, and five years of studies in Minnesota (home to thousands of Ojibwe and ten of thousands of Somali youth), this presentation argues that deep consideration of contexts and learners such as these is productive for the development of a robust field of second language acquisition and applied linguistics more broadly.

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This year will mark the 40th anniversary of the Educational Linguistics program at the University of Pennsylvania, and the 25th anniversary of the Nessa Wolfson Speaker Series.¹ The Ph.D. program in Educational Linguistics was founded under Wolfson's leadership in 1976, followed shortly by masters-level programs in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and Intercultural Communication (ICC). The first talk in the Nessa Wolfson Speaker Series, given by Dell Hymes in October of 1991, was entitled "Inequality and Language." In light of these anniversaries, and in recognition of the many contributions of scholars of Educational Linguistics to date, as well as the pressing challenges of the present, this talk draws on the roots of Educational Linguistics as a field, and highlights findings from five years of studies in Minnesota, home to thousands of Ojibwe and tens of thousands of Somali youth. Through an overview of this Minnesota data and the broader scholarship of Educational Linguistics, I suggest that consideration of contexts and learners such as these is essential to

¹ This article was written for an invited presentation at the 26th Annual Nessa Wolfson Colloquium held the University of Pennsylvania on October 26, 2016.

the development of a robust field of second language acquisition and applied linguistics more broadly.

Indigenous Language Learning and Applied Linguistics

Thousands of individuals in the United States, Canada, and elsewhere worldwide are currently endeavoring to learn highly endangered, Indigenous languages. This work is taking place in homes, in schools, in community contexts, and online, by both adults and children, in isolation and collaboratively. These efforts range from the large and well known (like the Navajo and Hawaiian cases), to smaller scale and undocumented. For instance, Marleen Haboud is leading a major project in Ecuador, *Así Dicen Mis Abuelos*, which records narratives in Quichua and other Indigenous languages of the country, creates literacy and pedagogical materials, and disseminates them to schools, communities, and families. The aim is to document oral traditions, and concomitantly, to promote meaningful language and literacy experiences and interactions with and among youth in these languages.

In the U.S. state of Kansas, Lizette Peter (2007) has documented the work of the Cherokee Nation to develop immersion schools to support Cherokee language learning. Her qualitative work on this program suggests that this early immersion approach has the greatest potential to reverse language shift and restore intergenerational transmission. Yet her examination of children's acquisition of verbal morphology demonstrates that while kindergarten children were beginning to apply the necessary inflections, they were limited in their ability to accurately convey everyday actions of others, suggesting that the language present in immersion classrooms is not always optimal for higher levels of attainment (Peter, Hirata-Edds, & Montgomery-Anderson, 2008).

In my current home state of Minnesota, Ojibwe speakers reside in seven rural reservations, but also in urban centers such as Minneapolis/St. Paul. In part due to the Department of Indian Affairs's relocation policy (1953–1960), many Ojibwe have grown up in urban areas. Of the estimated 84,000 Indigenous people in Minnesota, 42,000 reside in the urban areas of Minneapolis/St. Paul. With only an estimated 500–700 U.S. citizens as *first speakers*² of the most endangered dialect of Ojibwe (Southwestern Ojibwe), there is a strong grass-roots push for revitalization. Encouraged by language immersion camps, classes, and a growing number of immersion schools, second language learners of Ojibwe are nonetheless struggling to find effective ways to learn a language that they rarely hear in everyday conversations. With the recent addition of a searchable on-line dictionary (Ojibwe People's Dictionary, 2012) and online learning materials such as *Ojibwemodaa* (an online Ojibwe language learning program), text-based resources play an important role in this work.

A major aspect of the Ojibwe language reclamation effort has been the development of immersion schools. Following the establishment of Waadookodaading Ojibwe Language Immersion School in 2001 and Niigane

² *First speakers* is used here to differentiate between those who have learned Ojibwe as a first language and those who have learned it as a second language, although there are many who fall somewhere in between this dichotomy, including those with passive or receptive skills only, latent speakers, and those who learned as a first language but have had to re-learn it as adults. *First speakers* is often preferred given the myriad problems with *native speaker*, still widely used in applied linguistics.

Ojibwe Immersion School in 2002 (Hermes, 2004, 2007), three additional elementary/preschool immersion programs are in operation, and at least four more pre-schools are under development. Despite these efforts, to date, relatively few adults have learned Ojibwe to a high proficiency level as a second language, and as a result, there is an extreme shortage of qualified, fluent teachers.

Nevertheless, there is a very deep commitment to the language and a strong desire to teach and learn it. We documented success stories, but also challenges to learning, and in particular, the painful identity politics at play (King & Hermes, 2014). As we note,

Indian country is replete with identity politics, which in large part are manifestations of the U.S. government's blood quantum system. [...] An untenable system of national membership, coupled with a culture that has been repeatedly exploited through identity appropriation, has created a minefield for language learners trying to position themselves as members of an Indigenous language learning community. (p. 279)

Speaking Ojibwe offers a means of belonging, and yet many learners are inhibited and bullied by a critique of supposedly not being Native enough. These insecurities, which can be understood as the scars of colonization, lead to a search for a so-called authentic language, wanting to be an authentic learner/speaker, and the need for validation from other learners.

Our work has also documented the efforts of urban families who use computer technology to promote and recover the language (Hermes & King, 2013). This research revealed intense investment by parents (and some teens) at home, often isolated in urban and suburban locations. Perhaps most telling, however, were the phone calls we received when we were recruiting participants for this study. We sent out a few announcements on Native-focused email lists looking for volunteers to participate in a university-run study of family language learning of Ojibwe, and within three hours, we had more than 100 calls and my university voice mailbox was full. Most callers recorded messages such as, "Please pick me. I've been wanting to learn Ojibwe my whole life. This is the chance I've been dreaming of."

Louise is a long-time learner of Ojibwe who offers a powerful example of these dynamics.³ Like many learners, Louise worked for years, even decades, to learn the language, often through a combination of community activities or institution-based courses. Louise studied Ojibwe on and off in elementary school as a subject, and then more seriously as a second language in college. As she said in an interview with us,

When I left the college in 2003, I had gotten an A in every single one of my Ojibwe classes, but I still didn't feel confident enough to have a conversation. I can read my notes and tell you exactly what everything is. I can give you a grammar lesson. I could teach it to you too but that's just an awareness of what the language is and how it works. That's not speech, not conversation.

In large part, Louise is describing the learner experience of language *curricularization*. As Valdés (2015) argued in a recent article (and in the 2015 Nessa

³ Louise is a pseudonym.

Wolfson Colloquium), when a language becomes curricularized, it is no longer treated as a species-unique communicative system that is acquired naturally in the process of primary socialization, but becomes a curricular subject or skill, which is then ordered and sequenced, learned, and tested in artificial contexts.

Like many learners, Louise had invested heavily in approaches to language learning that are common in some Native communities. We describe these approaches as: *submersion* (attempting to learn by listening for hours of extended speech far beyond comprehension level), *book learning* (memorizing decontextualized grammatical items), and *performance* (placing heavy emphasis on memorized, often static, self-introduction speeches; King & Hermes, 2014). These practices are ideologically and historically rooted, informed in part by history of genocide, discrimination, racism, and unequal access to quality schooling. They also, unfortunately, we suggest, hold limited opportunities for the types of interaction which second language acquisition research suggests are productive for language learning (e.g., Gass & Mackey, 2006).

This particular story has a happy ending: Louise eventually became an unusually successful learner, largely because she was able to get herself into communicative contexts that demanded she use the language interactively (and moved her away from the common approaches to language learning described above) as a preschool aide. She paid a heavy price for bucking these norms; along the way, she was “bullied” (in her words) and belittled by more advanced learners of Ojibwe when she attempted to communicate (imperfectly). These speakers made her feel anxious, insecure, and unworthy of the language, and like an inauthentic speaker. Through perseverance and a lucky set of circumstances, she developed a level of proficiency that allows her to work in an immersion context.

There are many, many other examples, of course, of both learners and programs. As large numbers of endangered languages are at risk, this is urgent, immediate work. Yet it should also be noted that this framing of languages as *endangered* has been questioned by numerous scholars (King & Hermes, 2014; Leonard, 2008; Meek, 2011; Perley, 2012) who take issue with discourses that value language as a litmus test of cultural maintenance, that link the displacement of language with *extinction* of entire peoples, and that, through the metaphor of *loss* (as if the language were a sweater accidentally left behind), erase the historical trauma of colonialism and repression (Perley, 2012, p. 137; Engman & King, in press). Nevertheless, reports of speaker numbers do play an important role in raising awareness and garnering support; and while their estimates are problematic and imperfect, UNESCO (2016) regularly collects and disseminates the most comprehensive and up-to-date data. This work indicates that at least 43% of the estimated 6,000 languages spoken in the world are endangered.⁴ Most (but not all) of these languages have fewer than 1,000 speakers.

⁴ Definition and level of endangerment are not determined by number of speakers alone. UNESCO uses a nine-factor scale based on: (1) Intergenerational Language Transmission (scale), (2) Absolute Number of Speakers (absolute number), (3) Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population (scale), (4) Shifts in Domains of Language Use (scale), (5) Response to New Domains and Media (scale), (6) Availability of Materials for Language Education and Literacy (scale), (7) Governmental and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies, Including Official Status and Use (scale), (8) Community Members’ Attitudes towards Their Own Language (scale), and (9) Type and Quality of Documentation (scale; UNESCO, 2003).

Despite the plethora of initiatives and urgent timelines suggested by other qualitative data and large-scale speaker estimates, these students, families and programs are only occasionally studied or supported by applied linguistics and second language acquisition (SLA) researchers. This is partly related to the widely noted bias within SLA towards English (and a handful of other high prestige languages; e.g., Sridhar, 1994), but stretches beyond that. For example, a review of top journals in applied linguistics indicates that endangered and Indigenous languages very rarely emerge as central topics. For instance, the *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics (ARAL)*, for the last 10 years (2006–2015), published a total of 264 articles. These invited articles by leading experts in the field are meant to provide overviews of “recent research in key areas of the broad field of applied linguistics” (ARAL, 2016). Only one of the 264 articles addressed Indigenous or endangered language teaching, learning, policy or use in this decade (King & Hornberger, 2006). Put numerically, less than half of one percent of articles in the flagship journal of the field of applied linguistics addressed endangered, Indigenous language learning.

Of course, many of the review articles address general language learning processes and topics, for instance, formulaic language (Polio, 2012) or assessment (Spolsky, 2009), that are certainly relevant or applicable to Indigenous or endangered languages. What is notable, however, is that despite many examples of deep dives into specialized areas (e.g., language assessment in aviation, Alderson, 2009), there is a near absence of focus on Indigenous or endangered languages.⁵ This is true even for issues which focus on context, such as the 2011 volume, *Second Language Instruction in Different Settings*, with detailed articles on study abroad, teaching signed language to adult hearing speakers of English, and task-based language learning in Asia Pacific regions among other topics. Similar trends are evident in applied linguistics and studies of SLA.

This picture, however, looks very different when we compare articles in similar journals, which are closely linked with, but perhaps not as central to applied linguistics or SLA. For instance, *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, a journal that “draws on anthropological theories and methods to examine educational processes in and out of schools, in US and international contexts...[and] to address immediate problems of practice as well as broad theoretical questions,” published 189 articles in the same ten-year period, from 2006 to 2015 (AEQ, 2016). Of these, 16 articles, or eight percent, focused on an aspect of Indigenous language revitalization.

In short, applied linguistics, a field that is centrally concerned with language teaching and learning, has done relatively little work to support the hundreds of endangered, Indigenous languages in our midst. In contrast, anthropologists of education, together with sociolinguists, have documented the ideological, sociolinguistic, and policy aspects of language revitalization in some detail. This is perhaps not surprising; as Flores and Lewis (2016) argued recently, sociolinguists have long been advocates for linguistic diversity. Meanwhile, linguists working on endangered and Indigenous language documentation, while frequently motivated by broader goals of language reclamation, often work independently from both sociolinguistics and applied linguists, and publish on an entirely different track

⁵ This is not a comment on the work of the Editor(s) or Editorial Board (on which I serve), but rather a reflection of the engagement of the field; put differently (and bluntly), if we as applied linguists are not doing the work, there is no research to be reviewed or anyone to review it.

(e.g., publishing in newly established journals such as *Language Documentation and Description*). While this ten-year article analysis of *ARAL* is just one imperfect measure, it clearly suggests missed opportunities for collaboration, support, and learning across multiple contexts.

Refugee Language Learning and Applied Linguistics

We are in the midst of the largest refugee crisis of the last century. The UN recently reported a record high of 65.3 million forcibly displaced people worldwide (UNHCR, 2015); put differently: if all of these displaced people formed a new country, it would be the 21st largest nation in the world. And contrary to common public perception in wealthy nations, the vast majority of displaced people (86%) are hosted in economically developing nations (UNHCR, 2015). Many are “temporarily” housed in refugee camps, where the average wait for placement is 17 years (U.S. Department of State, 2016). Taken together, these numbers mean that schools—in the United States, Europe, the Middle East, and elsewhere—are welcoming ever-larger number of students with histories of limited or interrupted formal schooling (e.g., Advocates for Children of New York, 2010).

Minnesota is home to the largest population of Somalis in North America (upwards of 50,000). The state serves more than 16,000 students who speak Somali at home (Minnesota Department of Education [MDE], 2014). Large-scale Somali migration to the region started in 1991 due to civil war. Immense human tragedy, the struggle for survival within a failed state with few functioning schools, followed by long waits in refugee camps have resulted in a high incidence of low print literacy skills among many Somali adolescents (Abdi, 2007). The on-going lack of political stability in Somalia has contributed to continual migration and generations of children who are growing up or were born in the diaspora.

In recognition of the large number of students in the region with limited or interrupted formal schooling, the State of Minnesota recently amended legislation to include a definition of Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) as those who come from a home where the language usually spoken is other than English; who enter school in the United States after grade 6; who have at least two years less schooling than peers; who function at least two years below expected grade level in English and math; and who might be preliterate in their native language(s). While this designation was meant to track (and potentially direct funding towards) schools serving SLIFE, no state-wide numbers exist yet. Schools in Minnesota (and elsewhere) have struggled to meet the needs of SLIFE (e.g., Bigelow & King, 2015, 2016). This is particularly true of students who arrive in late adolescence. These youth face the simultaneous challenges of acquiring literacy, learning years of missed academic content, and figuring out how ‘to do’ school, all while learning through and acquiring a new language, English. In Minnesota (as in many other contexts), few options for native language instruction exist for these students.

As districts and schools are under intense pressure to measure and demonstrate student growth, one question that frequently emerges is: What are appropriate expectations and timelines for language and literacy learning? Research has little to say on this question for older adolescents in high school settings; the literature that exists tends to focus on adult learners (e.g., Condelli et al., 2010), and to

suggest about 140 hours of instruction for a half grade-level equivalent gain (L. Condelli, personal communication, 2016).

In order to understand more about typical and atypical long-term learning trajectories, we (King and Bigelow) followed one group of new students throughout the course of one academic year (September to June). All of these students were East Africans, native speakers of Somali, and recent arrivals to the United States. They all had severely limited formal schooling experiences and beginning-level English skills, and for these reasons had been placed in the lowest level, basic English literacy class, a two-hour block at the newcomer high school they attended. We observed their class one to two times per week, taking notes and at times video-taping, and we pulled each student out of class once per month for individual testing of decoding skills in English and Somali.

Faisal is one such student and a study participant.⁶

He was 20 years old at the time of the study, a native speaker of Somali and started school for the first time in late Spring of 2015. His performance on the native language literacy assessment in Somali, administered in September at the start of the academic year, indicated unfamiliarity with Somali script or few initial print literacy skills; he was unable to decode Somali words or phrases and could not write his name (Figure 1). Over the period of study, Faisal developed many literacy skills, including the ability to identify most letters of the English alphabet and their sounds; to recognize sight words such as *I, his, go, in, it*; and to spell via dictation words like: *a, in, I, is, it*, including use of capitalization and basic penmanship (Figure 2). Furthermore, Faisal had also learned some important ways of *doing school*, for instance, collaborating with others, organizing, and using varied school materials.

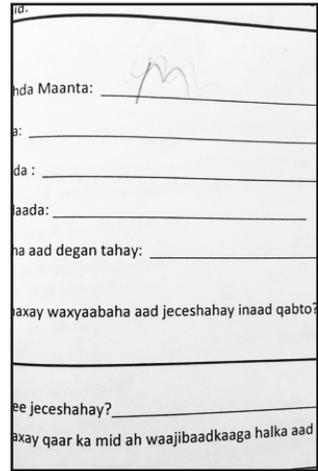


Figure 1. Faisal's response to native language literacy assessment at start of academic year.

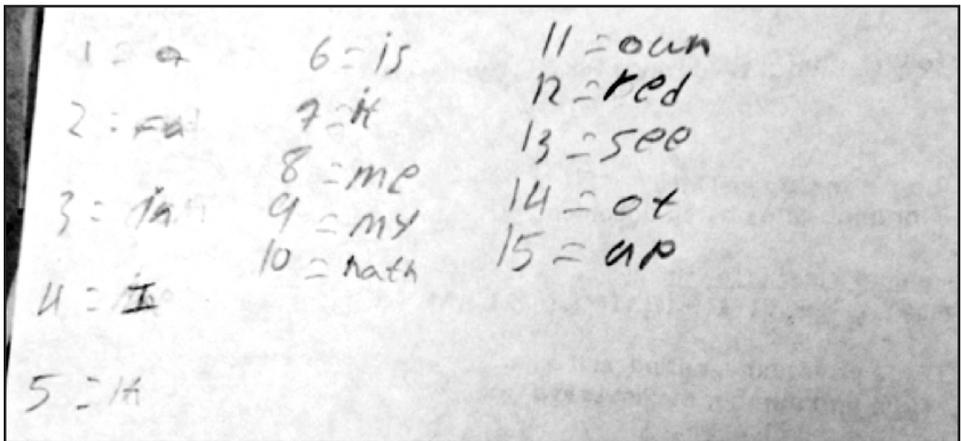


Figure 2. Faisal's penmanship and dictation skills midway through academic year.

⁶ Faisal is a pseudonym.

However, reading—that is, decoding and making meaning of written text—remained elusive. To measure growth in this skill, each month we asked students to independently read an excerpt from a short text they had worked with intensively in class. All of the English-language in class readings were from the *Sam and Pat* collection, a phonics-based series with each lesson (reading) targeting particular sounds (Hertel, Lowry & Hendon, 2006). To measure growth, we asked students to read the same *Sam and Pat* excerpt multiple times across the year (September, October, December, and May). We then calculated the percentage of words in each session that students were able to decode orally. Examination of Faisal's recordings demonstrates steady progress, from 5% accurately decoded (here meaning interpreting the letters as spoken words) in September, to 15% in October, to 25% in December, to 42% in May. Moreover, Faisal seemed to gain confidence as a reader over the year, moving through words more quickly each month.

This simple word count does not adjust for the fact that many of the words (e.g., *Sam*, *Pat*, *at*) appear multiple times in each reading. Moreover, despite this steady growth trajectory, video analysis also indicates that Faisal is still challenged by this text in May: he cannot decode the majority of the words here; he seems to rely on his memory of other *Sam and Pat* stories; and even in the final May assessment, at a few points, he names letters individually, suggesting that reading for meaning remains elusive. Faisal was not unusual in his progress or in the varied ways in which reading assessment was approached. Other students performed reading by naming letters, reciting other recent texts, or restating sentences from memory from other parts of the class routine (e.g., *Today is Thursday*). Like many of his classmates, Faisal clearly made progress over the semester, but this progress was insufficient to be registered on any standardized assessments in place in the district.

Furthermore, despite more than 600 hours of *treatment*, or formal schooling that entailed an intensive, two-hour ESL block as well as sheltered content classes, Faisal and his peers remain far behind their English-learning peers. Faisal will *age out* of high school (that is, no longer be eligible to attend due to age) prior to graduating. Understanding the learning trajectories and developing effective approaches for students like Faisal is arguably one of, if not *the* most pressing and demanding challenges for scholars of applied linguistics and SLA. It is also one that is infrequently taken up.

To this point, more than a decade ago, Martha Bigelow and Elaine Tarone (2004) demonstrated that adults with no formal print literacy skills significantly differ from adults with alphabetic print literacy in their performance of oral processing tasks that require an awareness of linguistic segments. Their work provided powerful evidence that the acquisition of the ability to decode an alphabetic script (that is, the acquisition of print literacy skills) changes the way in which that individual processes oral language in certain kinds of cognitive tasks. These findings require us to rethink key constructs in the field such as *noticing* in SLA. As they argued, who we study determines what we know about second language learning processes. While researchers have empirically rejected the notion that print literacy results in sweeping cognitive transformation (e.g., the so-called oral-literate divide, Scribner & Cole, 1981), there is substantial evidence that acquisition of alphabetic print literacy shapes specific aspects of cognition such as verbal working memory (Demoulin & Kolinsky, 2016) that we know are critical for SLA.

While SLA researchers have perhaps under-attended to these learners, sociolinguistic researchers, in contrast, have documented in some detail, many of the linguistic issues at play for refugees. For instance, McNamara and Shohamy (2008), and many others, have examined the intersection of language tests and human rights for refugees and immigrants. Jan Blommaert (2001) and other scholars have analyzed the role of language and discourse in asylum interviews. The field of language teaching and learning, and SLA research in particular, has been less engaged. Despite the fact that only about 83% of the world's adult population is literate (by UN definitions), nearly all SLA study participants are literate (and typically highly literate). In less economically advantaged countries, from which many of our K-12 school population hail, the literacy rates are estimated to be closer to 50%. With 67 million students worldwide not enrolled in basic education, this number is not expected to fall (UNESCO, 2016).

In short, it is problematic that so much of what we know and claim about SLA is based on the subset of world population that is among the most advantaged of the planet (e.g., often affiliated with the universities where SLA researchers are based). In other words, the field has yet to embrace students such as Faisal as typical. Fully meeting his academic needs demands an integrated approach drawing from research and practices in initial literacy and second language acquisition, while integrating both academic content and culturally meaningful approaches to learning. It entails addressing basic questions such as: What does long-term so-called typical progress look like for students such as Faisal? Furthermore, how can pedagogies most effectively (and simultaneously) promote development of native language (and English) literacy and content knowledge and skills?

So What Drives These Gaps?

Why hasn't applied linguistics fully stepped up in light of these pressing needs and previous discussions (e.g., Valdés, 2005) around these issues? Answering this question demands that we examine this gap from different perspectives, of which there are many. As a starting point, we should note that working with students with limited or interrupted formal schooling is challenging for researchers, logistically and conceptually. For instance, these individuals can be harder to recruit for study participation, and for researchers, it can sometimes be challenging to describe and document often complicated histories of language learning and schooling—and thus to make comparable or homogenous groupings—and furthermore, to ensure informed and ethical participation in the research study (Ngo, Bigelow, & Lee, 2014).

Some of these challenges hold true for Indigenous language learners too. Furthermore, from the perspective of some speakers and learners of Indigenous languages, it is important to understand that central terms and constructs within SLA and applied linguistics are inappropriate at best and insulting at worst. As an illustration, University of Minnesota Ph.D. student Melissa Engman recalls her experiences at a language teacher training meeting, which included witnessing an Ojibwe elder's resistance to the dissonance she perceived between the field of SLA and her work as a language teacher, mentor, and community leader. After listening quietly to a senior university-based language acquisition expert describe

the ins and outs of second language (L2) learning, this elder spoke up. She took issue with the categorization of Ojibwe as a “second language,” arguing, “Ojibwe is our first language. We’re born with it....It is a seed inside us” with a certainty that appeared to resonate with other Ojibwe teachers in the room.

Echoing these sentiments, American Indian scholars and educators (White, 2006; Willow, 2010) have criticized what might be called the tone deafness in SLA research that fails to account for the situation of English-dominant, Native people learning their own language (Engman, 2016). For instance, White’s (2006) critique of second language acquisition and learning (SLA/L) takes issue with the “foreign-ness” and stability of the second language in SLA literature (Engman, 2016). He argues that an Indigenous language’s lack of dominance in its own community is a wholly unique circumstance and he pushes for language acquisition research to re-categorize “the language situations of Native Americans learning their own language as a second language” (p. 105), drawing a distinction between SLA/L on the one hand, and Ancestral Language Acquisition and Learning (ALA/L), on the other. White’s distinction, one that is rarely clear to non-Indigenous researchers, is real and ever-present to the speakers and learners in the classroom (Engman, 2016).

For others involved in Indigenous language revitalization, dealing with time-intensive, politically complicated, laborious work of documenting a language with few speakers but often many dialects, developing materials, training teachers, and teaching the language are urgent and all-consuming. For some, engaging in conversations with applied linguistics seems unproductive and a distraction from the real, hands-on, in-the-trenches community work. For instance, as noted above, in Minnesota there is currently an immersion boom, with many Native leaders and organizations establishing Dakota and Ojibwe immersion schools; as suggested above, a major challenge is the development of teacher capacity. The need for teachers who are fluent language speakers of Ojibwe and/or Dakota; prepared to teach K–6 academic topics like math and science; and equipped to do so using content-based instruction (CBI) and immersion techniques is great, and the pool of teachers small. Yet in many cases, given the great sense of urgency, or the rare alignment of funding, school space, and state or local approval, these programs forge ahead and begin enrolling students. This intensifies the need for curriculum and materials development, for teacher support, and for meaningful assessments as there are children in the classes every day, often with teachers who, metaphorically, are forced to build the plane as they learn to fly it. Under these conditions, mainstream SLA research questions about, for instance, how to best group pairs of students for task-based language learning work, are low-priority.

Furthermore, longstanding immersion programs recruit and train their own teachers who see their work as a moral imperative, and they extend language development well beyond the walls of the school, engaging students in community events, teaching the language to parents and other family members, and occupying positions on the front lines of language activism (Engman & King, in press). Moving beyond school boundaries, these teachers and leaders continually ask, as De Korne and Leonard (in press) do, whether the “power structures that produce language endangerment and displacement are being meaningfully contested, or whether they are merely being reshaped and reproduced along familiar top-down lines” (p. 1).

More poignantly, Mary Hermes (2016), in a recent *MLJ Perspectives* column, writes in response to a discussion article about the role of pain in language teaching and learning, and the productive possibilities of a pedagogy of pain (Enns-Kananen, 2016). There, Enns-Kananen (2016) argues

that we [language teachers and language teacher educators] must find ways and approaches to tap into this pain and unsettling to teach language and social justice together ...[and]...that we have to look for the pain and unsettling within our world language curriculum and instruction in order to adequately address what happens around us. (p. 560)

Hermes (2016), in response, starts by defining the *we* involved in language revitalization. In her words, the *we* refers to those who are

trying to fill in for an entire race of people that is still somewhat missing, though slowly growing back. Our reasons for becoming language teachers are culturally specific first, and only secondly about language teaching. They are rooted in resistance, born from the resilient ancestors who kept their language alive despite the government's explicit attempts to kill it. This "we" who I am talking about grows up knowing, *is unable to not know*, about the pain, terror, and continued efforts to be eradicated—right here in this very 'safe' place called America. We are the people who experience intergenerational post-traumatic stress disorder (Braveheart-Jordan & DeBruyn, 1995) because we know that our ancestors were massacred, and we know that whatever we do not know or understand about our languages and cultures is a direct result of that (Stannard, 1993; Thornton, 1987). (p. 573, emphasis in original)

Hermes goes on to note, "for those of us engaged in language revitalization, our drive to learn is so deeply rooted in a very traumatic history that often we have already had to have dealt with pain (or the covering up of pain) before arriving in a place where we are able to learn our languages" (p. 573).

So What Might We Do Better Together (and Why Should We Try)?

Doing better and doing more is important here for at least two big reasons: the future of linguistic diversity and the future of applied linguistics. To the first point, we have hundreds of languages at risk, thousands of speakers struggling to teach and learn endangered languages, and the clock is ticking. While linguistic anthropologists and sociolinguists are highly productive in analyzing the language ideologies, political economies, and discourses of language endangerment (e.g., Duchêne & Heller, 2007), it is applied linguists who are best equipped to support and study mechanisms of language learning in these contexts. To be blunt, I worry how our field will answer the question: What were we, applied linguists, doing during the planet's most intense period of language loss and destruction?

The second reason this matters is for the future of our field. In simple terms, these learners must be included in our research so that our theory building can justifiably make universal claims (see Bigelow & Tarone, 2004). To do this, learners like Louise and Faisal need to be at the center of our field, not at the periphery. While I do not mean to imply that our field has entirely ignored these learners,

I do suggest that they are often treated as exceptions rather than norm. As noted above, the reasons for this are partly driven by the practical challenges of working with populations of learners that might be harder to recruit for participation or with whom it is more complex to build research partnerships, challenges intensified by the demands for researchers to conduct and publish research very quickly. Moreover, research with learners such as Louise and Faisal that demands that scholars, even those who are more psycholinguistically oriented, confront profound inequities and ongoing racial and linguistic hierarchies that shape learners' trajectories. This is not work that is easy or for which we are always prepared (Ngo, Bigelow, & Lee, 2014).

Revisiting early foundations of Educational Linguistics is potentially productive in re-centering the field or at least nudging it in that direction. As Educational Linguistics celebrates its 40th year at the University of Pennsylvania such a consideration seems both a timely and appropriate opportunity. On the occasion of its 25th anniversary, Nancy Hornberger (2001) argued that the University of Pennsylvania's Educational Linguistics program is characterized by: (a) a scholarly integration of linguistics and education (based on the relevance of linguistics for education, and the reverse), (b) a close relationship across research, theory, policy, and practice (that is, a problem-oriented discipline), and (c) a focus on language learning and teaching. Now for the 40th anniversary of Penn's Educational Linguistics, it seems worth revisiting these in light of the last 15 years of scholarship, but also with learners such as Faisal and Louise in mind. Here I suggest that Educational Linguistics is now defined by three related characteristics (which overlap with but are not identical to those identified by Hornberger, 2001). These are evident not so much in the brief early definitions of the field, but in the writings and trajectory of scholarship over the last four decades. Across this body of work, three related points are highly salient. The first of these I wish to highlight is a clear focus on context, a main point of the foreword by Dell Hymes (1984) in the inaugural issue of *Working Papers in Educational Linguistics* (WPEL). There he argued that the very notion of *applied linguistics* was in fact redundant; since all language always exists in a context, the notion of application was non-sensical. For Hymes, context was essential for all linguists, but in particular for "linguists working in the context of education," who "must address a speech community, and aspirations with regard to the acquisition and display of competence; the differential access and ability in regard to language that exists in every group; the local institutional structure of teaching and learning" (p. iii).

Hymes did not offer a succinct definition of Educational Linguistics in this early piece, but rather, put forth a forceful argument that the educational context is critical to the field. With respect to re-centering Louise and Faisal within the field of applied linguistics, a focus on context shines a spotlight on how these learners are both similar to, and different from, millions of other language learners. For instance, how are the opportunities for input, interaction, and the negotiation of meaning the same, and simultaneously fundamentally different in Ojibwe language learning contexts, where emphasis is often put on listening to extended amounts of speech in silence? And what are non-target-like utterances taken to mean in contexts where identity politics cut to the bone? As Hymes (1980) wrote, "to achieve equality within a given language it would never be enough to change the way that people speak. One would have to change what

the way people speak is taken to mean” (as cited in De Korne & Hornberger, 2017, p. 250). In other words, attention to context demands taking into account hierarchies and ideologies and crucially, how they shape language learning opportunities and trajectories.

Secondly, as Spolsky suggested in his (1971) work in the *Linguistic Reporter* (and Hornberger highlighted in her 2001 piece), Educational Linguistics is a problem-focused field. In this early piece on the limits of language education, Spolsky stressed that Educational Linguistics cannot resolve economic inequality or racism directly. In his words, “linguistic problems are a reflection of social problems rather than a cause. There is a linguistic barrier to the education of many children, but it is not the only barrier to social and economic acceptance” (Spolsky, 1971, p. 2). However, as Spolsky suggests, Educational Linguistics is well equipped and indeed, duty bound, to contribute to overcoming a wide range of educational linguistic challenges, and in particular (for Spolsky) those of students who do not yet master the language or dialect of formal schooling.

Spolsky proposed the term Educational Linguistics in 1972 at the Third World Congress of Applied Linguistics in Copenhagen, suggesting Educational Linguistics as “a sub-field of applied linguistics concerned with the interaction of formal education with linguistics” (1990, p. 76). Since its formulation in the early 1970s, Educational Linguistics as a field has been bounded not by a particular methodological or disciplinary approach, but driven by a focus on “the practice of (language) education, addressing educational problems and challenges within a holistic approach which integrates theory and practice, research and policy” (Hornberger, 2001, p. 11). Adopting this problem-focused approach puts learners like Louise and Faisal front and center. Indeed, what greater problem of practice is there than understanding and developing approaches to help a student like Faisal learn English, learn to read, and learn massive amounts of academic content before he ages out of public school in just a few years? What problem is greater or more urgently demands expertise from multiple disciplines than language reclamation?

Third, Educational Linguistics is implicitly or explicitly, equity and social justice focused. This was implicit in early work and is increasingly explicit in current scholarship. As De Korne and Hornberger (2017) note, Hymes’s deep concern with “unequal norms of language in schooling and with values of equality and social inclusion” were foundational in his work, and are shared by many researchers today (p. 247). As Spolsky (1990) has argued repeatedly, Educational Linguistics in particular (as well as applied linguistics more broadly), “do[es] not live in the ivory tower of cloistered academies, but the very real world of power and politics” (p. 75). This is evident in the scholarship that has flourished and emanated from the Educational Linguistics program over the last four decades. Hornberger (2001) highlights the breadth and depth of that work, much of which focuses on minority language learners, both here and worldwide (and more recent examples highlighted below).

Drawing on the work of Spolsky (1978) and Halliday (2007), Hult (2010) has argued that Educational Linguistics is a transdisciplinary field, defined not by a particular methodological approach, but by practical problems in areas of language and education. Educational Linguistics holds shared goals across “two poles of a continuum: (a) to understand the full range of social processes that relate to the

intersection of learning and meaning-making and (b) to formulate interventions that might facilitate relationships between learning and meaning making” (p. 2). Hult divides these groups into what he calls *reflection* and corresponding *action* areas for educational linguistics. For instance, researchers of language policy might ask: “To what extent does a particular policy promote assimilation or pluralism, monolingualism or multilingualism?” (reflection) or “What political actions are needed to create equitable educational opportunities for all students?” (action). Researchers of language testing and assessment, in turn, might ask “How does a particular assessment match (a) the language skills taught and (b) expectations for language use in specific social contexts?” (reflection) or “What instruments should be used to evaluate the full range of a student’s communicative competence?” (action; Hult, 2010, p. 24, questions slightly reworded here).

While not explicit in much of the writing about Educational Linguistics, all of these questions classified as action are centrally concerned with equity, social justice, inclusion, and fairness. As just one recent example, De Korne and Hornberger (2017) build on Hymes’s notion of *ethnographic monitoring*, describing it as a paradigm for “researching multilingualism in support of social justice, based on understandings of the researcher as a social actor and of social change as a collective process that emerges from ground-level realities and aspirations” (p. 247). Other recent examples of contributions rooted in this line of scholarship include (re)imaginings of TESOL through Critical Hip Hop Literacy (Barrett, 2013); demonstrations of what Gallo and Link (2015) call the *politicized funds of knowledge* of undocumented youth; and analysis of how young Black Liberian transnationals make and unmake racial identity (Smalls, 2015).

These three core characteristics—a focus on context, problems, and social justice—put learners like Louise and Faisal at the center of the field of Educational Linguistics. These are offered here not so much as a definition or bordering of the field of Educational Linguistics, but as a description of core, long-standing and present characteristics. Adopting this approach is to the benefit of many learners, and the broader field of applied linguistics. As is often noted, Educational Linguistics lacks clear borders, and Educational Linguistics scholars tend to not engage in border policing (Spolsky, 1990); indeed, the permeable nature of Educational Linguistics as a field could well be a fourth defining feature. The lack of sharp borders is potentially productive as it allows Educational Linguistics to bleed into and influence the broader scholarly community. And indeed, there are indications that Educational Linguistics, as well as its scholars and its scholarship, is growing in prominence and influence. For instance, our most prominent professional association, the American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL) only first recognized Educational Linguistics as a strand in 2013. Since then, it has grown in slots awarded at the annual conference (based on submissions and attendance at sessions) by a factor of three.

To this point, Hornberger (2001) draws on Van Lier’s (1994) metaphor of birds on a wire to characterize “the shifting and repositioning that goes on among academic disciplines when a new one joins their midst” (p. 18). If the already settled birds refuse to move along the wire and make space, the newcomer is forced to fly off. Hornberger suggested some fifteen years ago that Educational Linguistics had found its place on the wire. I concur, but want to further suggest that Educational Linguistics is now in a place to make room for other birds to land,

and to encourage others to make space as well. Scholars of Educational Linguistics increasingly are in positions where they can work against these implicit biases in the field, forge new, productive and collaborative relationships, and re-envision and remake the wire. One predictable challenge here, as Educational Linguistics is increasingly taken up and reinterpreted, is to hold on to these core elements—a focus on context, problems, and social justice. Doing so will help ensure that learners such as Louise and Faisal remain at the center of our work, to the benefit of both learners like them and the field. This is a challenge made more manageable by ongoing discussion, such as the one annually hosted here by the Wolfson family and the faculty, staff, and students of Educational Linguistics, allowing us to reflect on what Educational Linguistics is, and who it is suited to best serve.

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